
Stem Cell Board Approves Two New Research Initiatives of \$26 million to support research teams, new stem cell sources

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SAN FRANCISCO, October 3, 2007 Momentum at the California stem cell project is accelerating. Yesterday, the governing board for the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) approved two new grant initiatives, one that will fund a search for new types of human pluripotent stem cells and a second to support multi-disciplinary teams of scientists in pursuit of therapies for specific diseases.

"Pluripotent stem cells have the ability to generate every cell type in the human body," said Richard A. Murphy, Ph.D., CIRM's Interim President. "Currently, they are principally derived from fertilized human eggs, which can be difficult to obtain and, in the minds of some, are an objectionable source of cells, even when used for potential life-saving medical purposes. Recent studies suggest that new potential sources of pluripotent cells may be emerging, and we are keenly interested in supporting research in that direction."

A total of \$25 million in grants will be available for the development of new pluripotent human stem cell lines. CIRM expects to fund up to 16 grants for three-years, with average annual project costs of \$300,000. The Institute will begin soliciting applications for these grants later this fall, with approval by the governing board slated for the spring of 2008.

The second initiative will provide up to 20 planning grants of \$50,000, with the ultimate goal of funding disease teams to produce a therapy or diagnostic for a particular disease or serious injury. CIRM's objective is to explore a new method of integrating and organizing the highest quality basic, translational, and clinical research in a team setting.

"Our scientific strategic plan discusses in detail the potential for disease teams to develop therapies that can advance to the clinic more quickly, if they are actively managed and funded for extended time periods," said Arlene Chiu, Ph.D., CIRM's Interim Chief Scientific Officer. "Disease teams are an innovative model, one that has not been applied previously to stem cell research. The intent of the planning grants is to provide relatively modest sums to scientists who will enlist team members to help prepare research and management plans for major, long-term grants for translational research leading to clinical trials. We expect to begin considering these large proposals in a year."

CIRM plans to begin soliciting Disease Team Planning Award applications in November, with approval by the governing board expected next spring.

The governing board also approved contracting with Grantium for an electronic grants management system. The company currently provides grants management software to the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Innovation Institute of Ontario. The total contract value is \$702,000, and includes installation of the system and maintenance for three years.

The board received a report on the status of the 120 grant applications approved in 2007. An administrative review of each approved application is conducted by CIRM staff, to determine whether the applicant institutions and principal investigators are in fact eligible to receive funding under the requirements of the grant, whether the funds requested are appropriate, and whether the institution has the requisite oversight mechanisms in place to assure compliance with CIRM regulations. The board was informed that CIRM has issued Notices of Grant Award to 87 recipients, which must be signed and returned to CIRM before funds are released. One application for a Comprehensive Research Grant has been withdrawn; a Leon J. Thal SEED Grant application has been determined to be ineligible for funding. The rest of the grants (31) are still under review.

About CIRM

CIRM was established in 2004 with the passage of Proposition 71, the California Stem Cell Research and Cures Act. The statewide ballot measure, which provided \$3 billion in funding for stem cell research at California universities and research institutions, was overwhelmingly approved by voters, and called for the establishment of an entity to make grants and provide loans for stem cell research, research facilities, and other vital research opportunities. To date, the CIRM governing board has approved 136 research grants totaling almost \$208 million, making CIRM the largest source of funding for human embryonic stem cell research in the world. For more information, please visit www.cirm.ca.gov.

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